**Studying Abroad In Times Of Crisis - Differences Between Female And Male Secondary School Graduates**

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**Abstract**

Article presents different approaches towards studying abroad amongst pupils, who graduated in 2020 from one of the best Polish secondary schools, III Liceum Ogólnokształcącego im. Marynarki Wojennej RP (III LO, the Polish Navy High School No. 3) in Gdynia. It is based on the results of the research entitled “III LO, the Polish Navy High School No. 3 – Where Do We Go From Here? Emigrational and Educational Plans of The Graduates” which was carried out in 2020 by the Emigration Museum in Gdynia.

The project, executed in the form of a case study, aimed to learn about the educational plans of high school graduates, who intended to study abroad, and the main conditions associated with these intentions. Specific objectives covered such issues as: recognisisng the reasons and personal motivations that made the pupils decide to study outside of Poland; identifying personal experiences, which favour education abroad; recognising preferred destinations of educational migration; recognising the conditions of the decisions to leave Poland in the context of the pupils’ life circumstances, systemic solutions and plans for the future concerning personal as well as professional life; collecting information on potential private and professional plans after graduating from studies abroad; as well as determining the identity, which is being shaped, of the secondary school graduates, who have decided to study abroad.

The results of the project confirm that there are clear differences between female and male graduates both in their approach to studying abroad as well as in their migration strategies.

Keywords: student migrations, migration in Poland, male and female migrations.

**Introduction**

The analysis of migration trends in the 21st century reveals that educational migrations concerning mainly university students are one of the fastest developing forms of international mobility of people. The international character of higher education is nothing new. In fact, we can say that it has been an integral part of the European idea and tradition of higher education since the establishment of the first universities back in the 11th and 12th century. However, in recent years we have witnessed a significant increase in the number of people starting education at foreign universities. In 2002, there where 2.5 million international students, while in 2017 this number reached as many as 5.3 million [1, pp. 231].

This unprecedented, quantity-wise, intensification of student migrations has been reflected in the development of research, increased number of publications, and the elaboration of new theoretical approaches to this phenomenon. Source literature confirms that research on student migration should take into account the gender criterion. This idea is supported by, inter alia: Randi I. Kim and Susan B. Goldstein [2]; Mark H. Salisbury, Paul D. Umbach, Michael B. Paulsen and Ernest T. Pascarella [3]; Mark H. Salisbury, Michael B. Paulsen, Ernest T. Pascarella [4]; Kaylee Hackney, David Boggs and Anci Borozan [5] or Evie Browne [6]. The latter, however, stresses that there are still significant gaps in knowledge about the relationship between gender, education and migration [6, pp. 3].

This article presents different approaches towards studying abroad amongst pupils, who graduated in 2020 from one of the best Polish secondary schools, III Liceum Ogólnokształcącego im. Marynarki Wojennej RP (III LO, the Polish Navy High School No. 3) in Gdynia. It is based on the results of the research entitled ““III LO, the Polish Navy High School No. 3 – Where Do We Go From Here? Emigrational and Educational Plans of The Graduates” which was carried out in 2020 by the Emigration Museum in Gdynia.

**Methodology**

The project, executed in the form of a case study, aimed to learn about the educational plans of high school graduates of the Polish Navy High School No. 3 in Gdynia, who intended to study abroad, and the main conditions associated with these intentions. Specific objectives covered such issues as: recognisisng the reasons and personal motivations that made the pupils decide to study outside of Poland; identifying personal experiences, which favour education abroad; recognising preferred destinations of educational migration, universities and faculties; recognising the conditions of the decisions to leave Poland in the context of the pupils’ life circumstances, systemic solutions and plans for the future concerning personal as well as professional life; checking the level of knowledge and ideas on studying abroad; collecting information on potential private and professional plans after graduating from studies abroad (possible return to Poland or continued emigration); as well as determining the identity, which is being shaped, of the secondary school graduates, who have decided to study abroad (Polish, European, global).

The survey was intended only for those who plan to complete a full cycle of education abroad, which results in obtaining a qualification (diploma), i.e. a category defined as degree-mobile students. The target group did not include those students who intended to take up studies at Polish universities and then take part in student mobility aimed at gaining credit mobility, consisting in participation in various types of programmes (such as e.g. Erasmus+) that assume a stay at a foreign host university only for a fixed period (usually a semester or two).

The Polish Navy High School No. 3 in Gdynia is one of the best and most prestigious high schools in Poland. Since 1993, the school has been implementing the International Baccalaureate exam programme, conducted as part of Gdynia lnternational Baccalaureate World School. Offering a high level of teaching and allowing to take the International Baccalaureate exam, High School No. 3 naturally prepares its graduates to continue their education not only at home, but also abroad; its students and pupils should be perceived as the young Polish intellectual elite. The interview with the school’s management shows that every year several dozen graduates of this school plan to study abroad and strive to do so.

The surveys in the project involved two stages. The first stage consisted in quantitative survey in the form of a questionnaire, which was disseminated to all students of the baccalaureate classes, regardless of their plans for further education (undertaking studies in Poland or abroad). The survey was divided into two parts. The first part, of a general nature, was addressed to all students - it contained questions concerning, among others, motivation to take up studies in High School No. 3; opinions about learning in this school; possible experiences with living abroad and participating in some forms of education abroad; experiences of family and friends in emigration and studying abroad; identity issues, as well as plans for further education.

The second part, which is essential for the study, was directed only at those students who declared in the first part that they "rather" or "definitely" plan to continue their education abroad. The questions contained therein were formulated in such a way as to answer key issues from the research areas we have identified. In the period covering January/February 2020, a total of 141 graduates filled in the electronic and paper versions of the questionnaire, which accounted for over 64% of all students in the matriculation classes of High School No. 3 (220 students). Importantly, however, the survey was attended by 53 students who were planning to go to a foreign university. Taking into account previous information obtained from the management and the teaching staff regarding the number of future graduates intending to study abroad, we can state with a high degree of probability that almost all students from the group we are interested in took part in our survey (the management and the teaching staff estimated it at 40-50 people on the basis of initial declarations obtained from the students).

Conclusions included in this article concerning quantitative (variable) data were based on statistical analyses for the distribution of variables, carried out with the use of chi-squared test for proportions.

The second stage of the project covered a qualitative research carried out in the form of in-depth interviews. They were primarily aimed at deepening the information and verifying the data obtained in the quantitative survey. The qualitative part of the project, carried out in March 2020, included 20 interviews (with 13 females and 7 males). The invitations to participate in the interviews were sent to all the students who had declared the desire to study abroad in the quantitative research. Attempts were made to create a sample from amongst people who had agreed to participate in the interviews, which would reflect the proportion between girls and boys from the quantitative part.

The results of our project confirm that there are clear differences between female and male graduates both in their approach to studying abroad as well as in their migration strategies.

**Results**

The first basic difference between the male and female graduates is clearly visible in their approach towards studying abroad. 55% of the people surveyed were women and 47% - men. There was a visible difference in the declarations made by male and female students concerning their planned destinations of studying. Generally speaking, girls were more eager to plan studies abroad than boys (58% females compared to 42% males) (see Fig. 1). Meanwhile, this difference was marginal when it comes to plans concerning studying in Poland. The results of our research are here consistent with previous research findings, which indicate that women start studies abroad more frequently than men [3], [5]. For instance, basing on American research, Mark H. Salisbury and his partners claim that there are traditionally nearly twice as many women studying abroad than men [3, pp. 121]

Fig. 1 Declarations concerning the place to study broken down by sex

Source: [7, pp. 53]

Another difference concerned the motivation behind studying abroad. Almost 40% of surveyed people, who intended to study outside of Poland, indicated curiosity of the world (or a specific country), will to see new cultures, interest in multinationality, multiculturalism, diversity, as one of the motives. Usually, this reason was listed second or third, rarely first. However, it should be stressed that this reason was mentioned mainly by women (53%) and significantly more seldom by men (18%). Generally, when analysing the reasons for studying abroad, it should be concluded that the graduates focus, first and foremost, on such elements as: higher level of education, improving knowledge of a given language, better professional possibilities, as well as prestige and reputation of a foreign university (a symbol of one’s status, in a sense). Female pupils should be perceived as more cosmopolitan, curious of the world and open to different cultures (see Fig. 2).

One of the students explained the reasons of his decision to study abroad in the following way:

“When I made the decision I had an impression that the possibilities to grow are greater in Cambridge, it’s a well-known and good university, I’ll be able to gain more there. When I’m talking about growing, I mean the possibility to expand my abilities. People from all over the world come to Oxford and Cambridge, the competition is harder, it’s hard to be admitted, professors are from all over the world, there are lots of quotations - it all proves that I’ll be able to develop there greatly. (...) I’ll be able to gain more at these studies, learn more, it’ll be easier to apply for work; if I don’t become a scholar, it’ll be easy for me to find work.” (Male student 3)

Meanwhile, his female friend looked at studying abroad mainly through the prism of experiencing multiculturalism:

“I imagine it as living in a students’ village, amongst students from various parts of the world, in an international group.” (Female student 7)

Fig. 2 Motivation behind studying abroad broken down by sex

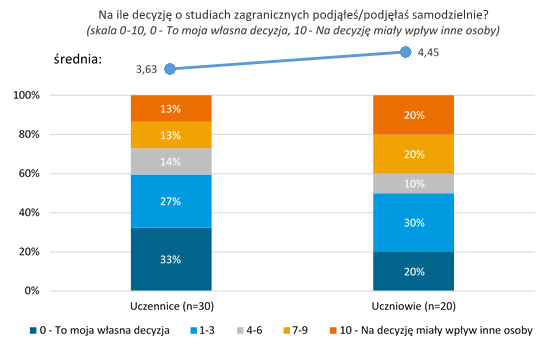
Source: [7, pp. 59]

Significant differences were visible also during the analysis of such conditions as the influence of other people on the decision to study abroad, getting support in this respect, as well as the time of making the decision to continue education at a foreign university.

Our research clearly indicated that girls were more inclined to make independent decisions to study abroad (at least at the level of declarations) than boys. On the other hand, male graduates are more influenced by the opinions of their relatives.

Amongst the surveyed females and males 28% (girls a bit more frequently at 33% than boys at 20%) declared that they had made the decision to study abroad entirely by themselves. In total, 60% of female pupils and 50% of male pupils admitted that they had made the decision by themselves or almost entirely by themselves (on the scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means it’s my own decision and 10 - other people influenced my decision, they chose between 0 and 3). Meanwhile, 26% of female pupils and 40% of male pupils admitted that other people influenced their decision to great extent (they chose between 7 and 10) (see Fig. 3).

The decision was most frequently influenced by closest family members (64% of specifying answers) and friends/colleagues (55% of answers, much more frequently in case of boys than girls, 67% and 44% respectively). Only one person admitted that their decision was influenced by teachers.



It was my own decision

Intending to study abroad

Girls

Intending to study abroad

Boys

Intending to study abroad

Other people influenced my decision

Intending to study abroad

To what extent did you make the decision to study abroad by yourself?  
(*scale 0-10, 0 – It was my own decision, 10 – Other people influenced my decision)*

Intending to study abroad

Mean

Intending to study abroad

Fig. 3 Influence of other people on the decision to study abroad broken down by sex

Source: [7, pp. 75]

Great majority of the surveyed people (88%) admitted that family and friends had supported their decision to study abroad. When considering the differences between sexes, it should be stressed that female graduates could particularly count on the support in this respect - as many as 97% of surveyed girls declared it (including 77% declaring strong support).

Meanwhile, male pupils were more often forced to face the consequences of their decision to study abroad by themselves - 14% of them could hardly count on the support of their closest family and friends in this respect, and “only” 45% declared that their family had supported their decision decidedly (see Fig. 4).

When it comes to the moment when the decision was made to study abroad, over a half of the surveyed people (54%) declared that they had always dreamt of studying abroad. They therefore seemed to have a long-term plan for their lives and studying abroad constituted its important element. While male and female pupils did not differ in case of this declaration, much more boys (41%) than girls (20%) admitted that they had made the decision to study abroad already at secondary school - The Polish Navy High School No. 3 in Gdynia. Meanwhile 27% of surveyed female graduates made this decision before high school (see Fig. 5).

The inquired female graduates have sometimes decided to leave Poland long before the start of their studies in The Polish Navy High School No. 3 - most often in junior high school. It is illustrated by the quote below.

“Friends and parents had some impact too, but I started thinking about it by myself long time ago. I guess in junior high school. Back then I just wanted to escape, but as time went by I started finding better arguments.” (Female student 9)

Definitely yes

Intending to study abroad

Rather no

Intending to study abroad

Rather yes

Intending to study abroad

I don’t know, it’s hard to say

Intending to study abroad

Definitely no

Intending to study abroad

Boys

Intending to study abroad

Girls

Intending to study abroad

Fig. 4 Support received from family and friends broken down by sex

Source: [7, pp. 75]

Fig. 5 The moment of taking the decision to study abroad broken down by sex

Source: [7, pp. 76]

Meanwhile, another female student stressed that:

“I decided to study abroad even before junior high school, because I chose class pre-1B. In my case it could have something to do with the fact that ever since I was 13 I was attending language camps. I was in Malta, Frankfurt. It made me see how different people from different countries are. It’s something I’d like to sink into in the future, not to block out everything outside my country.” (Female student 17)

Sometimes, the whole educational path - e.g. junior high school at The Polish Navy High School No. 3, the application for the class with International Baccalaureate was subordinated to the plan for life of the female graduates. One of the girls stressed in this particular context:

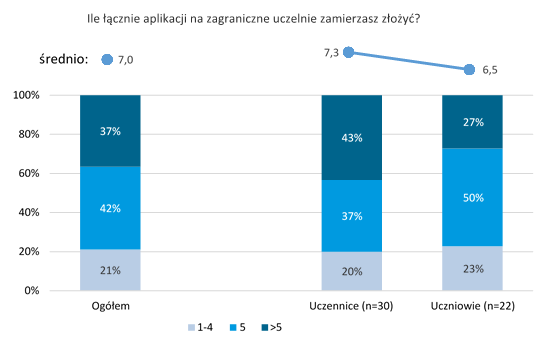
“I’ve always known I wanted to leave. It’s not a carefully considered decision, I did not list pros and cons. I know that it’ll make me feel best and I want to experience it. Ever since I was three I was telling myself: “I’ll live in London”.” (Female student 15)

Meanwhile, in case of the surveyed male students it took them a long time to make such a decision, and the final plan to study abroad was usually born already at high school in Gdynia. A certain male pupil is a good example here. He made the decision to study abroad at the end of the second grade and he thus had to catch up with physics:

“I started thinking about it when it was too late, i.e. at the end of the second grade. When I learnt what I wanted to study, what the requirements were, it turned out that my programme of education was not right. At the end of the second grade I was taking chemistry, maths and biology. It turned out I needed physics. When the third grade started I started catching up three years of physics in one year. I’m managing, I’m near the end.” (Male student 1)

In this context, the boys’ decisions were a bit more grounded. The data acquired in this research prove quite clearly why it was so.

The information collected during the quantitative (see Fig. 6) and qualitative research proves that the future male graduates applied less frequently for foreign universities. They frequently choose a single faculty and applied for it at several universities. They planned to apply in a particular year (2020) for the winter semester. In this context, the scope of their plan B was smaller, they were more determined to carry out one concrete plan.



How many applications do you plan to submit at foreign universities?

Boys

Girls

Total

On average

Fig. 6 Number of applications broken down by sex

Source: [7, pp. 84]

Meanwhile, the female pupils’ declarations revealed that they were much more frequently unsure what educational path to choose in the future. Hence, they would apply for more universities and faculties, sometimes divergent (e.g. finance, business management, furniture design). Therefore, the extent of their “plan B” or “alternative plan” was much greater. What’s interesting, girls would a bit more often have a psychological way out, i.e. plan B in the form of studying in Poland for the next year and applying for studies abroad in the next year/term.

One of the female pupils described her dilemmas concerning the choice of a faculty and university in the following way:

“I applied for five faculties, but I want this one most, because it suits directly my interests and names them. I didn’t know what I was looking for until I saw this faculty. I applied for one more faculty at the same university: film and TV production. (...) I planned not to study in Poland. Because of the virus and following my mom’s advice I’ll try to apply for Polish universities, to have some back-up if something happens. I’d prefer to wait one year and apply for this faculty.” (Female student 14)

The choice of the faculty and the reasons behind a given choice were another field where clear differences between girls and boys were visible. Female pupils were more often choosing faculties relating to humanities and art, while the choices of the male group were dominated by natural sciences, mathematics and statistics (see Fig. 7).

Fig. 7 Preferred faculties: most popular groups according to ISCED classification broken down by sex

Source: [7, pp. 82]

When it comes to the reasons behind choosing a certain faculty, the results of our research indicate that male pupils would more frequently chose a given faculty because of their interests and passions (57% of boys compared to 40% of girls). Meanwhile, main motivations of the girls included greater perspectives, higher level of knowledge, better rooms and labs equipment at foreign universities (53% of answers amongst girls, only 29% amongst boys) (see Fig. 8).

Life and professional plans after graduating from studies were the last field, where differences between sexes could be observed. Our studies reveal that only 12% of the surveyed pupils (including 18% of boys and only 7% of girls) planned to return to Poland after studies. Great majority (57%) planned to stay abroad - 67% of females and 45% of males made such a declaration. The remaining one third (31%) did not know yet what they would do (see Fig. 9).

Fig. 8 Reasons behind the choice of a given faculty broken down by sex

Source: [7, pp. 83]

Definitely no

I don’t know, it’s hard to say

Definitely yes

Rather no

Rather yes

Girls

Fig. 9 Plans concerning the return to Poland after studies broken down by sex

Source: [7, pp. 94]

**Conclusions**

Although the educational migrations of Poles have a centuries-old tradition, the political transformation (after 1989), Poland’s accession to the Erasmus programme (1998) and then its membership in the European Union (since 2004) have greatly facilitated and intensified the mobility of Poles to study abroad.

Thus, Polish students also started to mark their participation in global learning mobility to a greater extent than before. It is often emphasized that due to the fact that university studies in Poland have popularised and at the same time devalued, education at a foreign university is a strategy of investing in the quality and market value of higher education [8, pp. 33].

Despite the progressing processes of internationalisation of Polish higher education and the educational strategies of Polish students, only few decide to study abroad. According to the most recent data of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the total number of Polish mobile students studying abroad for the purpose of obtaining a diploma (degree mobility) in 2017 was 24,918 people (which accounted for about 0.5% of all international mobile students), and the most popular directions chosen by Poles were: United Kingdom (6565), Germany (4710), France (1565), Denmark (1462), USA (1429), Italy (1361), Netherlands (1284), Austria (816), Ukraine (678) and Australia (579) [9].

The study shows that female graduates are more “independent” in making decisions about studying abroad (at least declaratively) than their colleagues and more often declare that they made the decision on their own. On the other hand, male graduates are more influenced by the opinions of their relatives. There are interesting gender differences in the timing of decisions and action plans. The inquired female graduates have sometimes decided to leave long before the start of their studies in the Gdynia Three - most often in secondary school. Sometimes, the whole educational path – e.g. junior high school at High School No. 3, the application for a class with International Baccalaureate – is subordinated to this plan. On the other hand, however, female graduates slightly more often than males declare a certain indecisiveness as far as the future of their studies is concerned. On average, they submit more applications to more universities and faculties – sometimes incompatible.

On the other hand, males more often declare that their decisions have been “maturing” for quite a long time and that the final plan of studying abroad generally emerged only after taking up education in The Polish Navy High School No. 3 in Gdynia. They also choose a single faculty a little more often and apply for it at several universities. They plan to apply in this particular year (2020) for the autumn semester. In this sense, the scope of their „alternative plan” is narrower and they are more determined to study a particular field of study chosen earlier. In this context, the role of gender should be highlighted.

The results of the project confirm that research on student migration should be carried out on the basis of the gender criterion.

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